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ABSTRACT

One of 10 studies commissioned to investigate research needs and to stimulate planning activities, this paper reviews program evaluation in foreign language education (FLED), and offers a number of recommendations to improve present practice. It begins by noting that very little FLED program evaluation is taking place today, and by arguing that there is a pressing need for measurement instruments and validation studies so that such evaluations may be conducted in the future. The paper then analyzes five major problems that preclude effective dissemination and evaluation of foreign language education on the state and local level: (1) the wastefulness of current dissemination within professional societies, (2) the fact that the only funded entity for question-answering from local education agencies in the FLED field is at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, (3) duplication of data but little use by the public, (4) federally-funded projects that are not reaching their goals, and (5) little communication between FLED, English as a second language, and bilingual education communities. Six strategies are recommended whereby NIE can improve the situation. (Author/AMH)

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The Role of NIE

in

Foreign Language Dissemination and Evaluation

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The first part of this paper reviews program evaluation in foreign language education (FLED) and makes recommendations to improve present practice. The paper's second section sketches the roles of professional foreign language organizations in dissemination, and describes the part played by various governmental agencies. After identifying a number of problem areas, the paper concludes with recommendations that would make NIE's dissemination role more effective and that point some directions for inter-agency cooperation in federal FLED dissemination.

The term "evaluation" (which I am taking to mean "program evaluation" in this paper) may be interpreted in various ways, ranging from one or more rather informal visits to classrooms with little or no followup, to elaborately planned, multi-instrument reviews taking hundreds of man-hours to complete and costing thousands of dollars. The question of foreign language program evaluation has received specific attention in two recent publications.*

*Gilbert A. Jarvis and Shirley J. Adams, "Evaluating a Second Language Program," Language in Education: Theory & Practice, Vol. 19, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1979, and Alice C.

Results of a recent survey (in Omaggio) conducted by the present author show that there is very little program evaluation in foreign language education currently taking place, other than that associated with regular accreditation processes. The reasons for this seem to be the expense of tests needed to measure student achievement, the expense of data collection in general, and the lack of current valid language tests to measure student progress.

NIE has funded some excellent general materials for program evaluation in general over the past ten years, yet there is no evidence that these have been applied to FLED.

There is no need to dwell at length on current practice in the area of foreign language education evaluation in this paper; it will suffice merely to indicate that there are currently two pressing interrelated needs in order for progress to be made in the area. The first of these involves the needed development of language proficiency tests, already mentioned. The second, which depends in large part on the existence of valid, reliable and practical

Omaggio et al., "Looking at the Results," in June K Phillips, Ed. Building on Experience--Building for Success, #10, ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series, National Textbook Co., 1979.

tests, is the lack of a range of expected proficiencies (performance criteria) so that programs will have a yardstick against which to measure the knowledge that is currently being attained in foreign language classrooms in the U.S. I am not speaking here of federally-established national norms, but rather of a carefully-researched description of how much language is likely to be learned in real-life educational situations from a broad cross-section of public and private schools. One of the most compelling reasons for the gathering of this information is that the American public at large continues to have no perception of the amount of time it takes a human being to acquire meaningful competence in a second language.

Probably the most sensible way to measure verbal production is in an integrative procedure such as the oral interview, similar to the one currently under study by a consortium involving several government agencies (including NIE), some colleges and universities, and other professional groups and institutions. Such a procedure is, however, extremely expensive to administer, and for this reason will probably never be applied to more than a small sample of

the total population in even the most affluent of school districts. Paper and pencil tests can be designed, however, which correlate highly with the oral interview and which cost far less to administer.

There is a crying need in our profession for a study or a series of studies to determine just what the range of expectation for foreign language learning in the "real world" classroom should be. For example, how much German is it reasonable to expect to be learned in a high school setting with 25 students in a class, 50 minutes per day of instruction five times per week, and a total of 180 days per year, given average students with adequate motivation. Such a study would of course have to include a large number of students from a broad spectrum of different school settings, in order to account for variance which would be attributable to such things as teaching approach, materials of instruction, and the like. It is important to note that such a project WOULD NOT involve yet another "blue ribbon" panel which would sit and theorize about what "should be learned." This has been done repeatedly in our profession over the past twenty years, particularly

in well-funded school systems, and the results have been included in curriculum guides that may be found in some quantity in the ERIC system. A candid assessment of this approach to setting learning expectations would be forced to conclude that these wishful learning objectives have been rarely attained, and even more rarely tested specifically.

Some model foreign language program assessments/evaluations using the standards to be developed through the activities outlined above and following procedures developed in previous NIE-funded generalist program-assessment models should be performed to show how different schools and districts might perform foreign language program evaluations. Such model programs would preferably not involve direct federal funding but would rather find ways to enable the local education association to tap state funds by establishing priorities for foreign language study in general, and program evaluation in particular.

The dictionary definition of the word "dissemination" equates the term with words such as "broadcasting" or

"spreading," thus denoting a one-way flow of information. In education circles over the past decade or so, the word has come to have a much stronger meaning, including not only the process of broadcasting, but also two-way information exchange and even technical assistance, as the case of the National Diffusion Network, which provides a mechanism for teachers who have developed certifiably effective materials to provide on-site consultation for those who are considering implementation of new curriculum. The word "dissemination" is used in the stronger sense in what follows.

In order to assess the current status and possible future role of NIE in FLED dissemination, it is necessary to outline the most important entities, both governmental and private sector. Although there are currently no data to support the assertion, the author's impression is that most information dissemination in foreign language teaching takes place through the various professional societies, which form a patchwork of subject-specific foreign language associations at the local, state, regional, and national levels, both across-language and language-specific, which are important purveyors of information to the foreign

language teaching community, and which are typically the first source of information sought out when a foreign language teacher cannot obtain a satisfactory answer from the colleague next door or from the district coordinator. In the following discussion, I will first sketch the overall network of professional societies; I will then attempt to characterize the information flow in FLED that results from this situation.

At the national level, one finds two basic types of foreign language professional organization; one type comprises teachers of specific languages (e.g. American Association of Teachers of French (AATF), American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP), Chinese Language Teachers Association (CLTA), etc.). The second type of organization draws its membership from teachers of all languages: the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and the Modern Language Association of America (MLA). ACTFL, a spinoff organization of the MLA, is composed primarily of secondary teachers of foreign languages and teacher-educators. The membership of the MLA is for the most part teachers of English literature in higher education; most MLA activities in foreign language concern higher education instruction.

Although not intended to be competing and although particularly within the past several years much effort has been expended to help these various organizations to work together, the net effect of this multiplicity of professional organizations is one of divisiveness. This is true particularly today as the annual dues increase steadily, and teachers are forced to belong to fewer professional societies. In choosing between professional associations, the teacher's primary criterion is likely to be, "Which of these associations provides me with the most information that I am able to put directly into practice in my classes?" For many, this question leads to the language-specific association. And, since there is unsystematic information exchange between these associations, there continues to be a lack of one main information source in the language-teaching profession, with several smallish (membership between 7,000 and 10,000 individuals) in an essentially competitive relationship.*

Superimposed upon the national scene just sketched is a network of regional and state foreign language organizations

*For an ardent yet succinct treatment of this subject, see David P. Benseler, "The American Language Association: Toward New Strength, Visibility, and Effectiveness as a Profession," in Thomas H. Geno, Ed. Our Profession: Present Status and Future Directions, Northeast Conference, 1980.

that play an important role in information dissemination. The regional entities are really conferences that do not purport to have "membership." Most important of these are: the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NEC), the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT), the Central States Conference on Foreign Language Education, and the Pacific Northwest Council on Foreign Language (PNCFL). The secretariats of these organizations are for the most part staffed by part-time (sometimes unremunerated) personnel, usually on college and university campuses.

Within states, there is yet another level of organizational structure. Typically, there is a state foreign language organization that attempts to cater to the needs and interests of all foreign language teachers. The strength and vitality of these organizations vary greatly, and depend to some degree on the strength of the presence of national and regional organizations in the state in question.

Most of the national language-specific organizations have state (and sometimes local) chapters. State chapters

tend to be staffed with entirely voluntary labor, and to meet in conjunction with the state "generic" (all-language) association one or two times per year.

What are the implications of this multi-layered structure for dissemination within the foreign language profession? The national "generic" organizations (ACTFL and MLA) have two principal vehicles for disseminating information to their constituencies: publications and professional meetings. Each organization publishes a journal (MLA publishes several, some of which have little to do with teaching foreign languages. ACTFL also regularly publishes a bibliography on FLED and sponsors the annual publication of the ACTFL Series on Foreign Language Education. ACTFL has also initiated a Materials Center, where curricular units in various languages may be purchased for classroom use. These materials, before being accepted for publication by ACTFL, have been reviewed by a committee of experts. Both MLA and ACTFL have full-time paid office staffs, including professionals in FLED who can respond to questions from constituents. Neither organization, however, is set up to respond to multiple substantive requests from practitioners. It is likely that a large proportion of such

questions received by ACTFL and MLA is referred to other practitioners in the field, since office staff tends to be in contact with a wide spectrum of practitioners at their respective level (secondary education for ACTFL, higher education for MLA).*

The second principal vehicle for information exchange in national generic language organizations is the annual meeting. Neither ACTFL nor MLA publish a proceedings for their annual meeting, though an attempt is made by both organizations to attain broader information flow by varying the place of the meeting.**

Most teacher questions deal with materials and approaches to instruction; one of the most valuable parts of the annual meeting is therefore the exhibit area where textbook and audiovisual publishers display their wares. One gets the

* Information regarding foreign language instruction in elementary school has tended to "fall through the cracks" in recent years; a project at the Center for Applied Linguistics is currently filling in this information gap.

** One year ago, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, as an experiment, agreed to publish a selection of abstracts of presentations made at ACTFL. There has been relatively small demand for the product, which would lead one to think that, for ACTFL'S constituents at least, the annual meeting is strictly a one-time opportunity for information exchange that is limited to those individuals actually in attendance.

impression that from many instructors' point of view, the larger the exhibit area, the more successful the conference. This is also the only opportunity that both commercial publishers and foreign language teachers have to engage in any systematic dialogue with one another. This dialogue takes place in an unstructured way in the exhibit area, and is sometimes followed up with public forums where language teachers and publishers can exchange views in a more systematic fashion.

In a move to provide more intensive and extensive information exchange, ACTFL instituted some years ago the idea of the pre-conference workshop, which allows for concentrated treatment of a particular topic during a day or two. While an extremely valuable opportunity for a few individuals, the technical assistance obtained in such workshops is in reality not available to those unable to attend ACTFL annual meetings.

The MLA provides a similar experience to the higher education community in its series of Summer Seminars sponsored by the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL),

though in these seminars the focus tends to be on broader professional concerns and management matters rather than on the detail of instructional techniques.

A special case in the national dissemination picture for foreign languages is that of the Center for Applied Linguistics. Created over two decades ago by the MLA to serve as a research and information center for applied linguistics and the teaching of English as a second language, CAL has become valued as an information source in those areas by the public and the private sectors alike. While CAL's newsletter, the Linguistic Reporter, and CAL's publications have received high marks, it is primarily as a source for specific answers to particular questions that CAL has been valued. Traditionally viewed as a source for questions pertaining to the uncommonly taught languages and ESL, the Center has increasingly become a source of information in FLED since 1974, when the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics returned there.

Dissemination functions of the language-specific national organizations vary widely according to the resources of the individual professional societies. Most publish both a newsletter

and a journal, and conduct an annual meeting, a number of of them in conjunction with a national "generic" organization. In addition, several provide a variety of additional services, for example, an office to help establish a foreign correspondence program, a travelling realia program, coordination of a foreign scholarship and exchange program for the language in question, the sale of curriculum units for teaching the language. The secretariats of the individual organizations are not set up to be information centers any more than are the offices of the generic organizations, for the same reason: lack of resources to engage in large amounts of question-answering. Like the generics, they answer a significant proportion of their questions through referrals to individuals in the profession.

The regional generic organizations (NEC, SCOLT, Central States, PNCFL) are all focussed on holding a yearly meeting and on publishing the proceedings of that meeting. These publications, particularly those of the NEC and the Central States, are highly regarded as important resources in FLED. These regional organizations are not membership societies and do not have full-time salaried employees. Their secretariats are thus not equipped, with perhaps one excep-

tion, to handle information requests other than those in response to a specific item in a conference newsletter, for example.. The possible exception, the Northeast Conference, is the largest and oldest of the conferences, having at various times helped establish or re-establish two of the other regionals. The NEC has for a number of years held a film festival as a part of the conference activities, and has made a number of the films in the festival available to the foreign language teaching profession by establishing a rental library at the secretariat. The Conference has also begun this year to hold workshops in the late winter, separate from the traditional conference date in spring.

State generic foreign language associations typically furnish channels for information exchange through newsletters and through annual meetings. Depending on the resources available to the state organization and the talent of the individuals in leadership roles, the state newsletter and the state meeting can be extremely valuable sources of information for the classroom teacher of foreign language. In addition, some state organizations have considerable information resource and dissemination programs. For example,

some state organizations maintain speaker's bureaus with travelling workshop teams or individuals who are available to school districts for inservice presentations. Some state organizations have canvassed their memberships for teaching ideas, and have organized "telephone trees" in order to contact the maximum number of teachers in the state for an annual meeting. This kind of dissemination truly reaches the grass roots!

Usually, the foreign language coordinator in the state office of education (SEA) is involved with the state generic organization in an unofficial capacity, and serves a crucial liaison function to let the leadership of the state foreign language profession know where the SEA priorities are. This individual can frequently be of invaluable service to foreign language information dissemination. The fact that several states are without such a coordinator today has no doubt a negative effect on the quality and extent of information flow in those states.

State chapters of language-specific organizations (and some local chapters as well, although some of the latter tend to be quite autonomous) tend to work hand-in-glove with

the state generic organizations, organizing their meetings to coincide with those of the generic organizations. Such associations typically have their own newsletters, and language-specific and generic organizations announce one another's functions in their respective publications.

What conclusions can one draw from the crazy-quilt of dissemination channels in foreign language education just depicted? There can be no doubt that the current system is duplicative and therefore wasteful. For example, many of the state FLED newsletter reprint material that has appeared in one (and frequently more than one) national newsletter or journal. State newsletters typically reprint material from a number of national-level sources.

The money that supports these separate secretariats and separate dissemination systems could perhaps be more efficiently spent on one information source that would be able to furnish responses in various languages but with reduced overhead, because of the consolidation of office and membership services.

3

To this writer's knowledge, three federal agencies currently account for virtually all FLED dissemination activity in the public sector today: the U.S. Department of Education, the National Institute of Education, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Within the Department of Education, the Division of International Education concerns itself most centrally with FLED, and with the dissemination of information about FLED. Typically the projects funded by the Research and Studies program have a dissemination phase, which at the least allows for for entering the final report of the project into ERIC. Area studies centers funded by ED are required to spend 15% of their federal funds on "outreach," which may be considered a localized form of dissemination. A wide variety of approaches has been taken to the matter of outreach by ED-funded centers, ranging from programs that appear to have virtually no impact beyond the parietal walls, to programs such as the one in Slavic area studies at Ohio State University, that has an impact throughout the state in the teaching of Russian. A recent study by the RAND Corporation has concluded that more effective dissemination of the results of International Edu-

cation programs is highly desirable. It is extremely likely that the leadership of the Division of International Education would welcome the opportunity to discuss with NIE staff collaborative ventures that might improve dissemination in this area.

The highly-touted National Diffusion Network (NDN) would be a natural place to find information about exemplary foreign language instructional programs spreading across the land. Yet a cursory glance through the last three issues of Educational Programs That Work, the yearly catalogue of programs that NDN disseminates on the national level, shows that virtually no foreign language programs have been included in the NDN rolls in recent history. (There have been a number of projects featured in migrant and bilingual education.) One may object that this is not NDN's fault, that the fault lies rather with the federal programs that failed to fund foreign language projects, so that NDN, which may only disseminate information about programs that were developed with federal funds, is the only scapegoat here.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics is major effort in FLED dissemination. Currently, ERIC/CLL's activities

center on the building of the ERIC database through the acquisition, selection, and technical processing of information in FLED and several other related fields, question-answering, and information analysis through synthesis papers on topics of current interest to CLL consumers and published by the Center for Applied Linguistics as the series, Language in Education. The writer served for six and one half years on the staff of ERIC/CLL, first as Associate Director, then as Director. The following comments about FLED dissemination have their roots in this experience.

1. The best input to ERIC over the six years I spent with the Clearinghouse frequently came from Canada, most notably from the Modern Language Centre of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. This experience leaves the clear impression that the quality and interest of the FLED research being done in this country needs improvement. There is a considerable amount of extremely good research in English as a second language, and a much smaller amount of high-quality FLED research being done in the U.S. However, if we are to begin to extricate ourselves from the unfortunate situation language-wise depicted in the final report of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and Inter-

national Studies, the amount of FLED research and experimental curriculum development being done in this country should be much greater than it currently is.

2. There is a certain number of confirmed ERIC-users across the FLED profession in this country, but the rank and file of the FLED profession does not seem to go very far to seek the answer to instructional and research questions. One detects a quantum jump in the level of interest and in the amount of sophistication about ERIC use between, for example, attendees at a TESOL meeting (an English as a second language group) and a meeting of the Northeast Conference (a FLED group). Increasingly, the "cutting edge" of research and curriculum development is to be found among the teachers of English as a second language.

3. For perhaps three to four years, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics attempted to bring attention to what it had to offer by submitting material to the state newsletters in foreign languages described above. Subsequently, ERIC/CLL began publishing a newsletter of high quality, that also advertizes the services that the

clearinghouse makes available to foreign language teachers. The difference in response has been striking: while the clearinghouse message was no doubt reaching a larger audience through the combined circulation of state journals, the impact of the "News Bulletin" was enough better to cause much greater response in our constituents.

4. The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, funded jointly by NIE and ED, may very well be serving a clear purpose within the bilingual community. It does not appear to be serving the FLED community, in this author's opinion, for several reasons. This is unfortunate, since the Clearinghouse has been funded at a level which permits it to employ substantial numbers of subject-area specialists in a number of languages to better respond to user questions. One matter that surprised this writer upon hearing it from an NCBE staff member was that more than 30% of the items in the NCBE database are taken verbatim from ERIC, and are re-keyed into the NCBE database.

5. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has funded a greatly increased number of language projects since it placed a priority on such projects about five years ago. Overall, the experience has been that the results of these

projects do not get the wide dissemination that they deserve. Entry into ERIC is sporadic, and depends more on chance personal contact and on aggressive clearinghouse accessions strategy rather than on a mutually-agreed-upon acquisition arrangement between agencies. NEH is concerned about improving the dissemination of project results and products, though it is not clear what action will be taken in light of the current budgetary predicament of that agency.

In sum, it appears that the federal agencies currently active in the funding of FLED projects have in common an interest or a need to improve dissemination of information in FLED. It would seem that a relatively large increase in quantity and quality of information in FLED might be obtained by coordinating the dissemination efforts of the agencies involved.

To review the major problems in FLED information dissemination, let me list them below:

1. The current dissemination picture within and among the professional societies is extremely wasteful, because of the multiplicity of organizations in essentially competitive positions. It is hypothesized that most professional

societies do not have the resources in-house to answer questions and must refer questioners to other sources of expertise in the field. Since societies typically do not have the resources to do a systematic job of covering the field for such referrals, they must rely on the spur-of-the-moment recollections of staff members.

2. The only funded entity for question-answering in the FLED area exists at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. However, financial exigency within the ERIC system precludes maintaining the kind of expertise necessary to provide better in-house question-answering capacity.

3. It is hypothesized that the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE) is very little-used by the FLED community. It is questionable whether the most is being obtained per dollar spent by restricting use of NCBE to the bilingual community. Further, NCBE appears to be duplicating the ERIC database to the extent of more than 30% of its citations, and it appears to be acquiring these items by re-keying them for the NCBE database.

4. Federally funded projects in agencies other than NIE appear not to be realizing their dissemination goals

or potentials, and might profit from collaboration with NIE in this regard.

5. With several exceptions, exchange of information between FLED, English as a second language and bilingual education is almost non-existent. The three fields, which should be working closely with each other, do not even know one another. This is particularly true at the practitioner level.

In conclusion, the following six recommendations for action by NIE follow from the overview of FLED-dissemination and evaluation given above. Recommendation one below would involve the funding of a major project or group of projects. In informal discussion of a hypothetical project of similar scope with an official at NAEP several years ago, the figure of \$1 million was mentioned as reasonable. Recommendations two and three would involve survey studies of considerable size and sophistication, but substantially smaller than the one just mentioned. Recommendations four through six would cost very little, at least in the initial stages.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY NCER

1. Fund, alone or in conjunction with one or more other federal agencies, the development of proficiency tests in the commonly taught language^s (French, German, Spanish), and perhaps in other less-commonly taught languages, that are valid, reliable and practicable for measurement of competence in foreign languages. Such examinations should include not only "discrete-point" items, but should measure integrative, communicative ability in the foreign language as well. As a part of this project, a national study should be performed to determine what really is being learned in high school and college language courses. At the high school level, this research might be incorporated into a paradigm of program assessment which might serve as a model for schools across the country. Perhaps some of this research might be carried out through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

2. NIE should perform a study to determine the information needs of high school and college teachers of foreign language which would include an analysis of how they attempt to answer

their questions. This kind of study has been performed before on broad populations in education; the suggested study would be a kind of pilot that might be conducted across education by subject area, if results of the FLED study prove enlightening.

3. A parallel study to the one just suggested should be performed on teachers of ESL and bilingual education, and the results should be compared to those obtained for #2, above. This should give some clue to similarities and differences between FLED, ESL, and bilingual teachers, and might lead to insights into the differences that separate what should be complementary disciplines.

4. NIE should convene a group of appropriate individuals to determine what the priority of foreign language will be in the activities of various NIE programs in and relating to dissemination, e.g. Regional Programs, RDx and other programs of the labs and centers, and Research and Educational Practice.

5. NIE should take the lead in convening an interagency group to increase the amount of federal collaboration in the dissemination of information relating to FLED. A ready-made

nucleus for such an effort exists in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR), which meets monthly during the academic year. Probably all that would be necessary would be to gather a working group of ILR representatives for a series of meetings to determine what course of action should be taken, then to cost out the required activity and let a contract for the work.

6. NIE should assume a leadership role in calling for a federal and state priority in foreign language education dissemination. This would mean, in addition to the NIE internal priority mentioned in #4 above, that NIE would work with appropriate other federal agencies and state representatives to raise the priority level of foreign language study government-wide. Possible targets for such priority-raising would be: National Diffusion Network (NDN), block grants apportioned to states, and the reinstatement of the crucial dissemination positions of foreign language coordinator in many states where the position has either seriously eroded or has disappeared altogether.